

# **FIELD TOUR NOTES**

## **Hams Fork Vegetation Restoration Project**

### **July 7, 2011**

**Attendees:** Wes Miller; Kent Connelly, Lincoln County Commission; Mike Hunzie, WWF; Rebekah Fitzgerald, Governor's Office; Jim Wasseen, WGF-LCI; Ben Wise, WGF; Floyd Roadifer, WGF; Dana Stone, Wyoming State Forestry; Jonathan Teichert, Lincoln County Planning; Deb Wolfley, Lincoln County Commission; Phillip Lockwood, BLM; Dan Oles, BLM; Neil Hymas, WGF; Field Representative Reagen Bebout, Senator Enzi's Office; Legislative Assistant Chris Tomassi, Senator Enzi's office; Field Representative Sandy DaRif, Senator Barrasso's office; Field Representative Bonnie Cannon, Representative Lummis's office, Intern Daniel Dececco, Senator Barrasso's office; Mike Kania, USFS-RO; Bill Lyons, USFS-RO; USFS – Bridger-Teton NF: Bernadette Barthelenghi, Tracy Hollingshead, Lara Oles, Samuel Ainsley, Josh Sorenson, Anita DeLong, Kirk Strom, Ben Banister, and Travis Bruch; and Facilitator Dave Thom, Western Wyoming RC&D. (Note: several individuals informed the FS that they would not be able to attend due to conflicts, but desire to get copies of the notes and will continue to participate).

(Note: The following notes do not reflect all the details of the discussion at each field stop, but are intended to capture the main points presented.)

#### **Driving through BLM into Kemmerer RD**

The group got an overview of the Pole Creek prescribed fire, the Shingle Mill wildfire, and dispersed camping along Hams Fork. Group discussion when stopped at #1.

- Pole Creek burn consumed about 30% of the project area. Reduced the thick sage cover to bring back natural processes. Desire to burn more aspen but limited by moisture conditions and also late season dryness.

#### **Stop #1 – North of Hams Fork Campground (dispersed camping)**

- Very popular for camping and important to recreation economy. Lots of campers on July 4 holiday weekend.
- Consider using treatment roads to access new camping spots
- Group viewed 90% of trees killed south the spur road dispersed camping spot.
- North of the campsite trees were cut (thinned) for firewood and improved aesthetics of the campsite.
- “Shaded fuel breaks”, i.e. thinned lodgepole pines, improve the camping experience and protect the site from wildfire. Shaded fuel breaks also improve aspen



Figure 1 – Participants discuss dispersed campsite and hazard trees.

- growth. Aspen makes more desirable campsites.
- Consider proper access road design to ensure the road is usable for vehicles with trailers, and use best management practices for proper water drainage.
- Recreationists do not want to look at a bunch of dead trees. Some areas are too inaccessible to remove dead trees.
- Remove dead trees that can blow over in camping areas.

## **Stop #2 – Intersection of FR10198 and FR10062.**

Group viewed dead, hazardous trees along travel route.

### Roadless:

- North of Stop #2 along the primitive road is not included in the inventoried roadless area (the road was primitive-limited use). South of Stop #2 along the improved road is included in the inventoried roadless area. Group discussed this inventory conundrum and the need for Washington office approval for road construction within the roadless area.
- Governor's office desires to use all tools available and use all available roads as needed.
- Lincoln County will press for resolution of roadless inventory issue and approval of management actions within the inventoried roadless area as needed. County will testify at a July 26 hearing on Senator Barrasso legislation on roadless and wilderness study areas. Would like to know this group's wishes. Is it possible to provide the County that input at the July 13 meeting? Be sure to disclose that roads were approved under previous EIS's. County not asking for new permanent roads...use existing ones as needed.
- Use existing roads and not build new permanent roads. Temporary access roads may be needed and would be closed by the contractor. Not likely enough timber value to close roads through a separate contract after public firewood gathering.

\*\* FS will find out the length of temporary roads that can be constructed in inventoried roadless areas and provide to the group.

### Fuels, Hazard Trees and Scenery:

- The dead lodgepole in the area will be hip-high downfall in 10 years if not removed now. Desire to have a forb understory beneath living trees for best fire protection.
- Travelers on road could encounter downed trees in front of them and could have trees fall on road behind them entrapping them without means to remove trees. Safety issue.
- An option is to remove hazardous trees (probably cut and pile) 200' from the road. Very expensive.
- Could expand the treatment area beyond roadsides to include other adjacent dead and green timber to provide revenue for removing hazard trees while meeting diversity objectives and other goals. Firewood could be left along the road, although there is ample quantity in many areas. Could use



**Figure 2 - Participants discuss beetle killed hazard trees, roads in inventoried roadless area, and scenic quality.**

stewardship contract to do the work with more control than removal by public firewood cutting.

- Scenic quality. Visual quality objective from the Forest Plan for this area is “retention”, i.e. retain a naturally appearing landscape; human activities would not be apparent. Need flexibility to deal with beetle mortality and to improve quality in the long term. Will be short term effects, but treatment actions now can accelerate return to a more naturally appearing landscape. Do keep stump heights low.

### **Stop #3 – Aspen and shrub regeneration**

Aspen and municipal watershed:

- Viewed aspen that was cut in 1995 and is now about 6-15' tall. Aspen is shade intolerant, i.e. requires full sun and needs large openings. The treatment area was roughly 3-4 acres. Vigorous aspen suckering depends upon soil type and age and vigor of the mature aspen trees. Prescribed fire can be used and can lead to vigorous regeneration. Prescribed burning is cheaper than contracted mechanical/hand treatment. Timber sale revenue may cover project costs.
- Aspen projects should create large patches to avoid the heavy browse damage that can occur in small openings.
- The group walked on a road in the inventoried roadless area that was constructed or reconstructed for the 1995 timber sale.
- The West Hams Fork drainage (viewed in the distance) is water source for the community of Kemmerer. Water quality and quantity should be protected.

Canada lynx:

- The area above the road provides snowshoe hare habitat important for the Federally listed threatened Canada lynx. It is good hiding cover. Salvage of dead trees is possible as long as damage to the understory cover is minimized.
- Biologists use various survey techniques to determine lynx habitat.
- Why so much time and focus spent on what is likely very few lynx in the area? Answer: requirements for a listed T&E species.



**Figure 3 - Aspen enhancement done in 1995. Lodgepole pine in foreground, aspen suckers in distance.**

### **Stop #4 – Big Spring overlook (lunch)**

- Viewed prescribed burn units #1 & 2 (on map). They are aspen stands with a small amount of conifer. Need to do a lynx survey yet.



- FS should seek flexibility w/FWS and/or can do a Forest Plan amendment (not always desirable or possible)
- What are the highest priority aspen stands to treat? FS should review publication on aspen risk to first treat those stands at highest risk for loss. Sometimes may write those off and opt for slightly lower risk stands to be sure to retain them for the long term. Highest priority should be to ensure retention of aspen near riparian for beavers.
- Make large aspen treatment areas to avoid excessive browse damage.

#### **Stop #5 – Lodgepole pine shelterwood cut (within inventoried roadless area)**

- Mature lodgepole pine (10 acres) was shelterwood cut in 1995. The retained trees provide shelter and a seed source. Discussion: can lose the shelter trees to blow down, seed trees not necessary for lodgepole pine which hold seeds until opened by fire (in most cases), and the value of the leave trees could pay for other work if removed in the sale.
- Lodgepole pine will grow in dense conditions resulting in many, stunted trees. Very expensive to thin them and funding is limited. Thinning may reduce lynx habitat. Economics: dead trees may retain value for 3-4 years. Desirable to take green trees with the dead ones for financial feasibility.
- Governor's office desires that this project entice business development.
- Lincoln County has met with a number of timber industry representatives. They need a 3 year plan to make contract operations feasible. Project has to be big enough. Please provide a volume figure for the next meeting.
- Acreage available for a timber sale will be reduced to provide lynx habitat.
- The BLM may have some timber available to help support timber producers, too.



**Figure 4 – Discussion regarding 1995 era lodgepole pine shelterwood (background) within inventoried roadless area**

#### **Next Steps –**

- Next meeting is July 13 6:00-8:00 at the South Lincoln Training and Events Center. Agenda: 1) affirm or modify the “common themes” in the June 23 meeting notes, and 2) group will work on the treatment options and possibly reach tentative agreement pending additional FS staff work before the August 4 meeting.
- Participants were asked their preference for the July 13 meeting to: 1) be given a blank map for participants to develop treatment areas, or 2) have the FS provide some treatment options on a map that the group can adjust or modify as desired. Field trip participants wanted the FS to present maps and information on treatment options that they could modify as desired.

- Final meeting is scheduled for August 4, 6:00-8:00 at SLTEC. Intent is for participants to review their work from the July 13 meeting and any interim modifications, and confirm a “proposed action” the FS could use to initiate the formal environmental analysis (NEPA) process.

Tracy thanked participants for taking their valuable time to participate in this collaborative process. The field trip adjourned about 3:00 pm as rain began to fall.

**Recorders:** Anita DeLong and Dave Thom.

**Notes prepared by:** Dave Thom, Facilitator, Western Wyoming Resource Conservation and Development Council